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**Citation for published version:**

Wiszniewski, D 2019, 'Reima Pietilä and gesture in research-by-design: The Finnish Embassy in New Delhi, 1962-1982', *Nordic Journal of Architectural research*, vol. 2018, no. 3, 2, pp. 29-56.  
<<http://arkitekturforskning.net/na/article/view/1160>>

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

**Published In:**

Nordic Journal of Architectural research

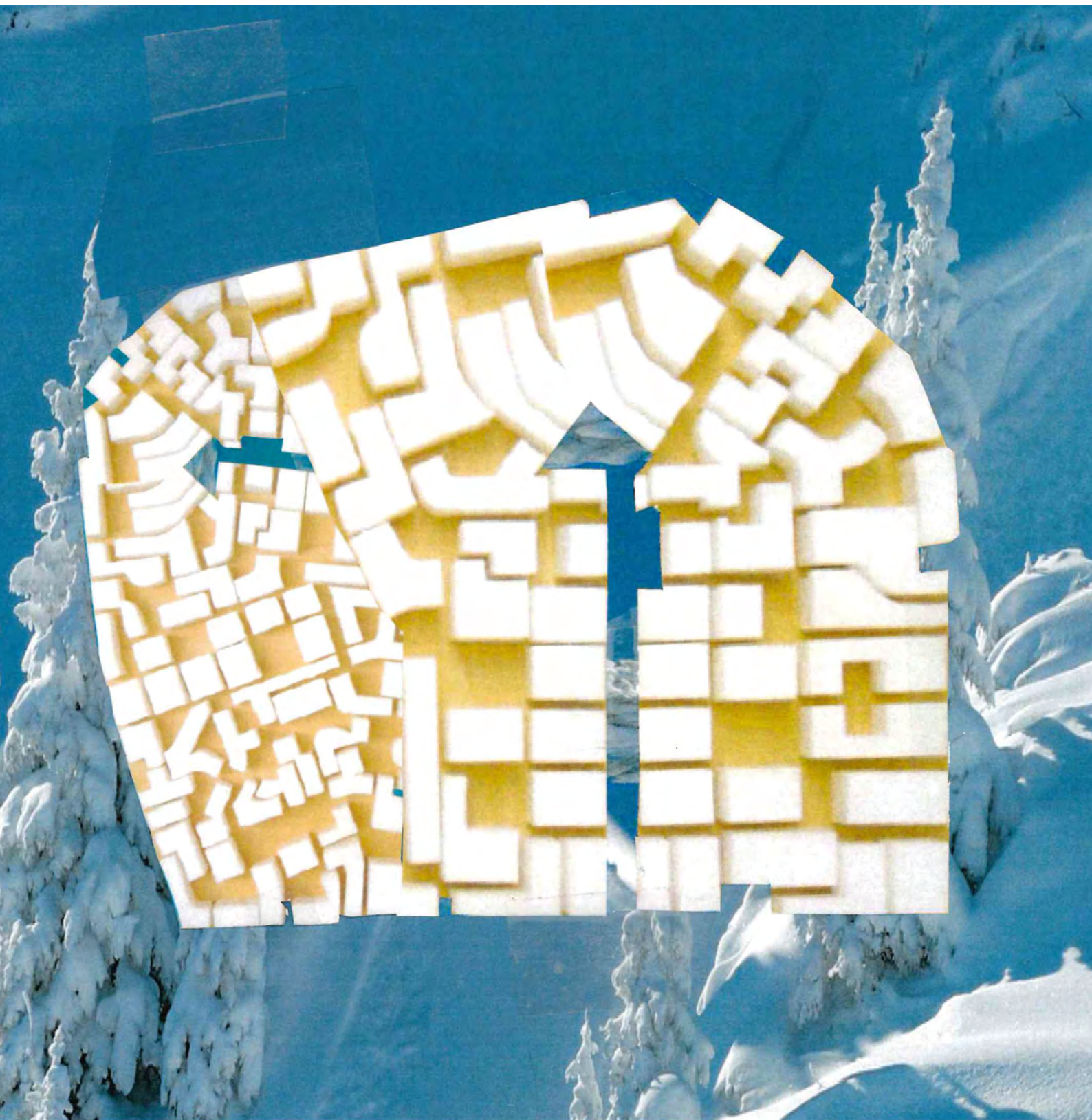
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# NORDISK ARKITEKTURFORSKNING

Nordic Journal of Architectural Research

3-2018

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Published by SINTEF Academic Press

P O Box 124 Blindern, NO-0314 Oslo, Norway.

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## REIMA PIETILÄ AND GESTURE IN RESEARCH-BY-DESIGN: THE FINNISH EMBASSY IN NEW DELHI, 1962–1982

DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI

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### Abstract

This paper will discuss Reima Pietilä's Finnish Embassy (*Suomen suurlähetystö*) in New Delhi, India, in relation to the interplay of *gesture* and *gestural* in the architect's design process. It takes theoretical impetus primarily from Giorgio Agamben and Vilém Flusser, who both write extensively and insightfully on gesture and each promote philosophical trajectories from *ontology-as-being* towards *ontology-as-becoming*. The research-by-design inflection of this paper directs the ontology of gesture through a small selection of drawings from the Pietilä Archive,<sup>1</sup> from the first and second phases of the building's production, and photographs taken on site by the author in 2014.

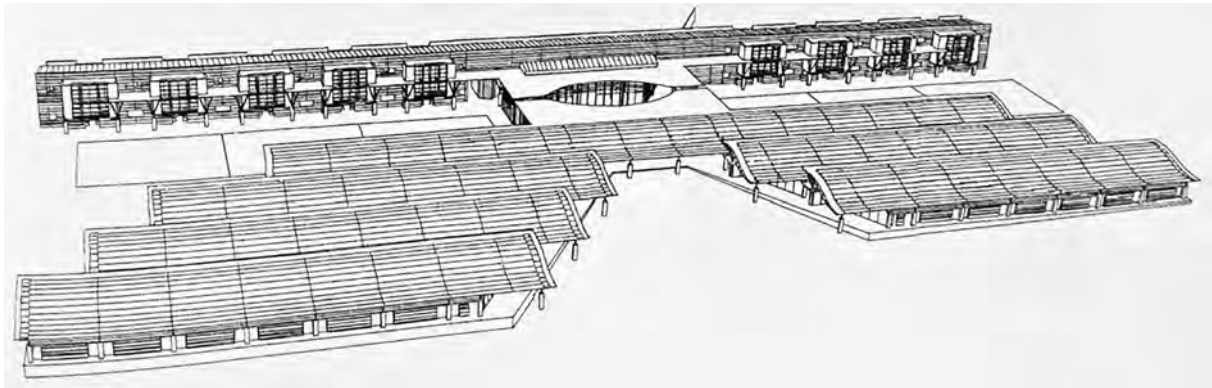
The paper will offer a view not only of how gesture and gesturing lie at the heart of Reima Pietilä's design process, but also how the communicative dynamic of the gestural feeds speculation into and pursuit of understanding through architecture. Therefore, beyond framing a number of Reima Pietilä's design methods and ways of thinking, the paper will also address how gesture constitutes a core communicative principle in Reima Pietilä's research-by-design methodology, ultimately suggesting that this methodology holds relevance for contemporary architectural design and research.

- 1 I was given access to Reima Pietilä's original drawings in the offices of ALA Architects, Helsinki, in July, 2015. They had custody of some of the archives whilst working on the refurbishment of both the New Delhi Finnish Embassy and Dipoli Student Centre.

#### Keywords:

Gesture, thought-image, thought-form, research-by-design, being-as-becoming





## Introduction

The first thoughts that I had about Reima Pietilä germinated whilst I worked on the designs for the Cable and Wireless Telecommunications College, Coventry (see Figure 1), with Macormac Jamieson Prichard (MJP) Architects in London in 1989–1993. It was then that I came across the publication of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy in the journal *A+U* (Quantrill, 1988). The Pietilä influence on the MJP project was enormous.<sup>2</sup> The particularly figurative character of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy influenced my conception of landscape and consequently the language of design at work in the project. Whilst this paper does not focus on the relation between these two buildings or practices, the design thinking that the New Delhi Finnish Embassy inspired is used here to theorize Reima Pietilä's design processes.

Much of the historical and theoretical background to Reima Pietilä's practice has been gained by looking to the various (published and unpublished) writings of Roger Connah.<sup>3</sup> Acting as Reima Pietilä's archivist (or "amanuensis" [Quantrill, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2007, p.127]), Connah was responsible for developing a range of possible readings of the architect's work – for example, Connah suggests Reima Pietilä's work can be read in terms of a cultural "carnival," as opposed to the "Saussurization" of architecture that saturated architectural theory in the 1970s and 1980s and was informed by Norberg-Schulz's phenomenology of place (Connah, 1985, pp.329–336). Articles by Finnish commentators have also been insightful, including the essays from the Pietilä Conference (November 28–29, 2005, at the Dipoli Congress Centre, Espoo, Helsinki), recorded in *Hikes into Pietilä Terrain* (Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2007), which include important insights into Reima Pietilä's pedagogy from ex-students. In summary, as I see it, possible categories of Reima Pietilä's research-by-design lay somewhere between a form-of-language and a language-of-form.<sup>4</sup>

The present essay addresses Reima Pietilä less as "the acceptable delinquent" (Connah, 1998, p.46) and more as "Modern Architecture Challenger" (Johannson, Paatero and Tuomi, 2008). The intention is limited to

**Figure 1**  
Cable and Wireless Telecommunications College, Coventry. MacCormac Jamieson Prichard Architects. The drawing was prepared for the catalogue of *Art of The Process, Architectural Design in Practice*, 1993. Edited by Louise Rogers. London: RIBA Publications. p.53.

- 2 The profound influence of Reima Pietilä's New Delhi Finnish Embassy on the designs for Cable and Wireless Telecommunications College within the offices of MacCormac Jamieson and Prichard is confirmed in an interview with David Prichard, *Architect's Journal*, December 19 and 26, 1990, p.29.
- 3 This author is grateful to Roger Connah for the access given to his various publications and the conversations which continue.
- 4 Of the native English language speakers and writers on Reima Pietilä, Roger Connah is distinctive for a number of reasons: he offers a view gained by working continuously alongside him for eleven years as confidante and archivist (Quantrill had a "discontinuous" working relationship with Pietilä between 1974–1993 [Quantrill, in Niskanen et al, 2007, p.127]); Connah has a deep and wide ranging knowledge of international and Finnish philosophy and culture; and as a recurring dialogical partner Connah offered extra agency to the intellectual gestation of many theoretical issues in Reima Pietilä's design research.



engagement with a specific architect (Pietilä),<sup>5</sup> a specific project (the New Delhi Finnish Embassy), and a specific category of communication theory that operates between a form-of-language and a language-of-form – that is, the theory of gesture. The challenge confronted in the paper is one of using this theory to engage with the thinking and practice of Reima Pietilä, whilst using his work to illuminate our understanding of gesture and its importance in the processes of research-by-design. The point is at least partially to overcome the criticism and perceived “failings” of design thinking, which has considered Reima Pietilä’s architectural production as weak theory or even as “anti-theory,” and his poetic “free-form” expressions to be “implausible” as contributions towards a science of design (Quantrill, 1998, p.51; and Quantrill, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2007, p.131).

- 5 It is evident that Raili Pietilä and others were important contributors to the Pietilä office. Malcolm Quantrill spoke to Raili Pietilä specifically on this point. She disclaimed co-authorship (Quantrill, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2017, p.129). Where I can speak directly of Reima Pietilä, I refer explicitly to him.



**Figure 2**  
Ambassador's Residence from Internal  
Courtyard  
Photos, Dorian Wiszniewski, June 2014

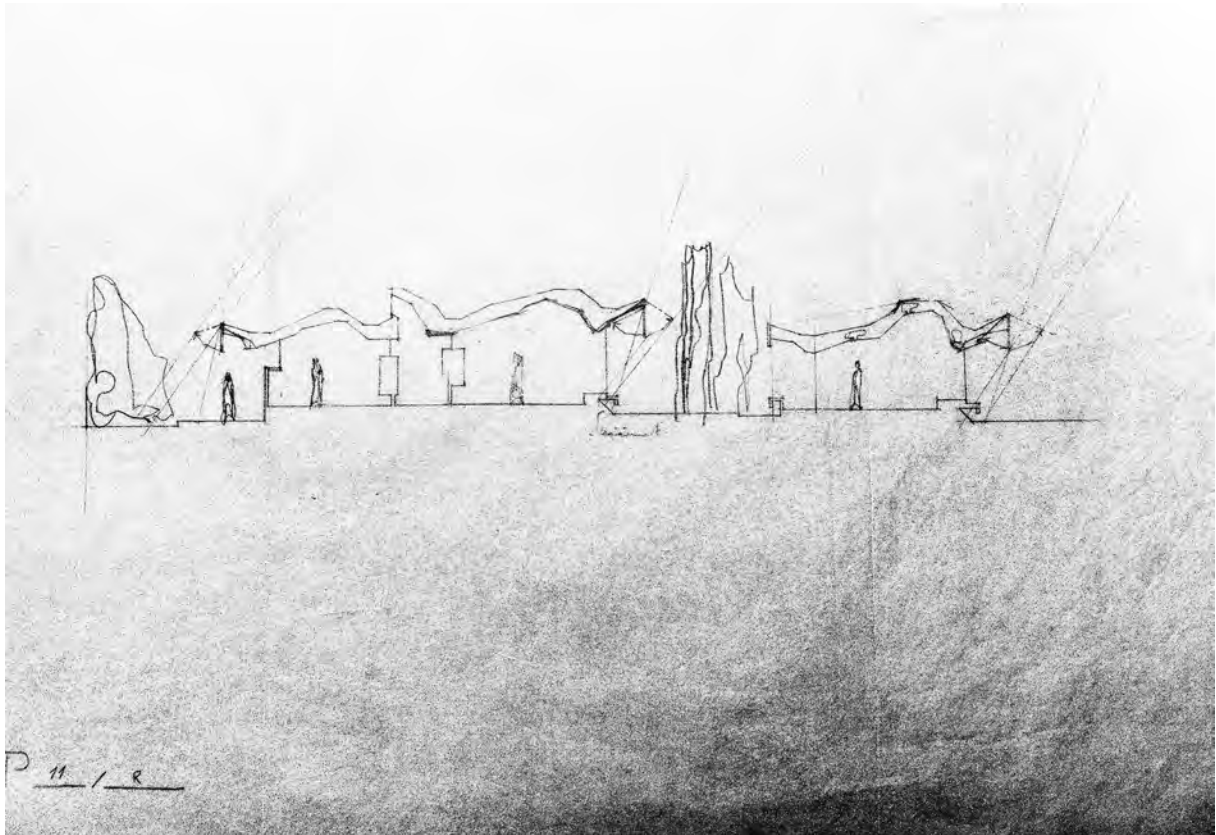
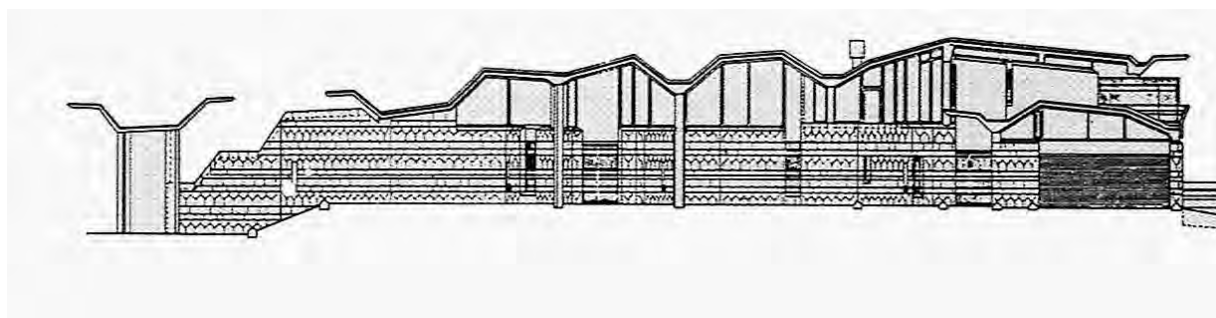


Figure 3a  
Conceptual Section, 1963 (first phase of design), Pietilä Archive, accessed and photographed in ALA Architects offices, Helsinki, July 2015.

Figure 3b  
Ambassador's Residence From entrance driveway  
Presentation drawing, 1980 (from second phase of design), (Connah, 1989, p.313)



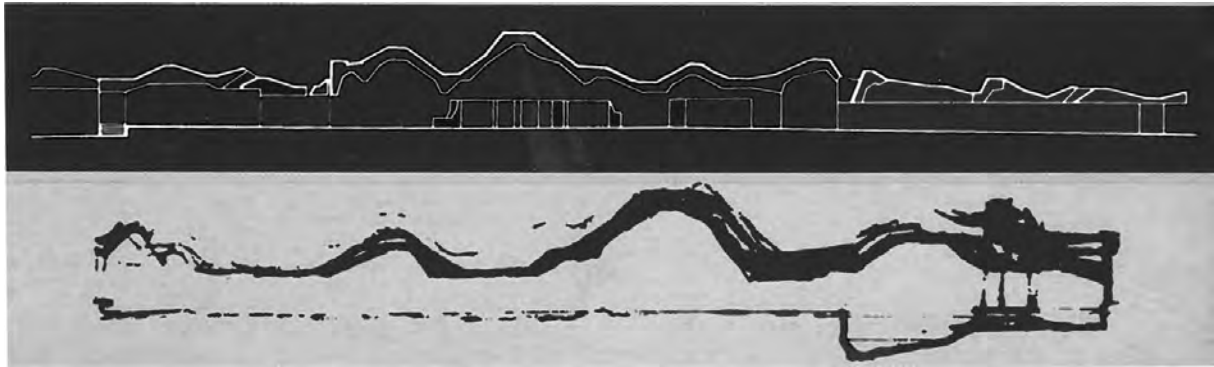
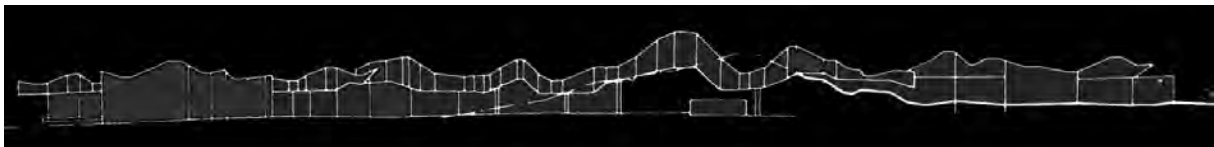


Figure 3c  
Conceptual Section, 1963 (first phase of design), (Connah, 1989, p.309)

Figure 3d  
Conceptual Section, 1963 (first phase of design), (Connah, 1989, p.310)



## What is gesture?

*How curious: we should like to explain our understanding of a gesture by means of translation into words, and the understanding of words by translating them into gesture. (Thus we are tossed to and fro when we try to find out where understanding properly resides.)*

*And we really shall be explaining words by gesture and gesture by words (Wittgenstein, 1981, p.40).*

A gesture is an ontogenetic act of communication using body movement. Gestures are key to how animals react to each other. In humans, the first act of communication may indeed also be a gesture (of the will to communicate rather than any specific communicative intent). However, in human gesturing, body movements very quickly become allied to language. Contemporary scientists of language suggest that language has evolved concomitantly with gesture. They suggest a “thought-language-hand link” (McNeill, 2005, pp.233–257). Without gestures, the neural pathways of language would not have developed as they have. The scientific view has its philosophical parallel: “Gesture is not an absolutely non-linguistic element but rather, something closely tied to

language. It is first of all a forceful presence in language itself, one that is older and more originary than conceptual expression” (Agamben, 1999, p.77). Consequently, we can say that how we move, how we act, and how we speak are all interrelated parts of how we communicate.

Wittgenstein suggests that “Architecture is a *gesture*” (Wittgenstein, 1998, p.49e). Foregrounding a reciprocal understanding between gesture and architecture, he goes on to say, “Not every purposive movement of the human body is a gesture. Just as little as every functional building is architecture.” For Wittgenstein, it is obvious that gestures are elevated forms of communication. Giorgio Agamben’s and Vilém Flusser’s theorizations on gesture add substance to this assertion. Gestures are not only fundamental forms of language, they are also highly developed forms of communication (Agamben, 1999, pp.77–85; Flusser, 2014).

Flusser suggests that the import of a gesture is co-dependent upon the two aspects that make it: first, the movement of a body and, second, the reading of the body movement as an attempt to comprehend what moves it by how it moves (Flusser, 2014, p.3). Illuminating something of Wittgenstein’s enigmatic fragment, for a movement of the body to become a gesture, purposive or otherwise, the action must be read as gesture. Reading the action is what turns movement (or stillness) into gesture and opens the way for the gestures of design and building to become architecture.

Between these two movements – *action-reading* – operate the fuller dynamics and communicability of the gesturality of architecture: there is an element of intention in the gestural/architectural action, and there is an element of prediction in reading action as gesture/architecture (Flusser, 2014, p.4). However, in the space-time gap between action and reading, there is no guarantee that intended meaning equates with predicted meaning. As the philosophy of hermeneutics tells us, the space-time gap of communication leaves room for interpretations beyond intention. Even word language is “weighed down” by this “gap” or “interval” in communication (Agamben, 1999, p.78). Poets and artists, all of whom operate through gesture, practice their special “conceptual and mimetic” and “predictive” talents in relation to this interval (Kommerrell, in Agamben, 1999, p.78). Gesture and architecture, architecture as gesture, can be considered as both embellishments of language and particular forms of language: “The world and life in it get an aesthetic meaning from the emotion-rich play of gesticulation” (Flusser, 2014, p.7).

## Why gesture?

There are three main reasons why we might think gesture is important in the study of Reima Pietilä's design methods.<sup>6</sup>

The first, and most obvious, is that the expressive impulse that gestures contain help us to come to terms with the two gestural movements Reima Pietilä invoked, from gentle *swerve* to dramatic *plunge*, to describe shifts in his design thinking between his early and later work (Quantrill, 1998, p.49). Pietilä embarked on the "emotion-rich play of gesticulation" as means to explore how architecture and a Finnish architect can express and embody the pursuit of modernity. His drawings and buildings are communicative frameworks; they form gestural frameworks of research into modernity.

The second reason lies in a consideration of the importance of the "gestic" as a model of architectural criticism. Whilst the "gestic" level of an architectural work is not usually the focus of analysis, Giorgio Agamben – developing a theory first suggested by Kommerrel, a not so well-known historian of the early 20th century – promoted the study of gestures as the critical study of history. Agamben's model suggests a concentrically organized system of three critical levels around a subject of architectural history. Of these, the first two levels are what we more commonly expect a critical account of anything to convey: there is a "physiognomic" level, that is, a critical account that situates the work, how it appears, within and against natural and historical orders; and there is a "philological-hermeneutic" level, which interprets the work and narrates it in a specific way, giving appropriate characterization to the various emplotments and actors within each plot (Agamben, 1999, pp.77–85).

The first two levels of the Agamben model are conveyed wonderfully by Roger Connah in relation to the work of Pietilä in his book *Writing architecture* (Connah, 1989). For example, "The Fortunate Galaxy" is particularly stimulating: Connah illuminates diverse direct and indirect cultural influences both from within Finland and beyond (Connah, 1989, pp.49–72). Connah evidently gave extra *swerve* to Reima Pietilä's trajectory of thought. His involved account of Pietilä's projects successfully places the reader on Pietilä's "bases" (Connah, 1989, *Bases*, pp.78–96) and within the Reima Pietilä life-world.

Connah recognizes the "gestic" but does not make it central to his study (1989, p.303).<sup>7</sup> The incredibly rich and quite unusual interwoven hyper-graphic and hyper-textual layout of Connah's *Writing architecture* lends itself to a gestural engagement with Reima Pietilä's outputs. Connah's book in many ways is as performative as Pietilä's architecture. Our virtual and physical selves are turned by it, caught in its rhythms and movements like a dance partner. Connah alludes to how the gestural has its apotheosis in dance and refers to Reima Pietilä's awareness of his

6 Also worth noting is the examination of the gestural in Reima Pietilä's architectural design pedagogy. In the hiatus between the competition win and building contract of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy, specifically between 1973–1979, Reima Pietilä was a design professor at University of Oulu, Department of Architecture. His course handouts for "Nykyarkkitehtuuri filosofiakokeessa" ("An experiment in modern architectural philosophy") makes explicit reference to the importance of the "gestural and nonverbal action drama" (Marianne Lehtimäki, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2017, endnote 5, p.94).

7 Connah mentions the text by Jean D'Udine, *L'Arte et la Geste*, via Rasmussen's *Experiencing architecture*.



architecture, the plasticity of architecture, as a “precise dance” (Connah, 1989, p.303). Dance is nothing if not gestural. However, rather than trace a single metaphor, the scope of this essay considers the New Delhi Finnish Embassy as one formation in the “constellation of gestures” that is Reima Pietilä’s oeuvre (Agamben, 1999, p.77), seeing it as one morphology of gestures that opens up to a whole gestural constellation of morphologies.

The third and perhaps most important reason why “gesture” is considered central to the study of Reima Pietilä’s design methods borrows from the urgency that motivates Vilém Flusser’s phenomenology of gestures (Flusser, 2014). Flusser, like several important cultural commentators and philosophers (for example, Bergson, Husserl, Heidegger, Benjamin, Ricoeur, Deleuze, Guattari, and also Agamben) argues for trans-historical criticism. This viewpoint, which I would argue was also Reima Pietilä’s, sees history at any point in time neither as progress nor decline. Rather, history is at any moment seen as a multiple timeframe that encompasses past and present in varying patterns of continuity. For Flusser, not only is gesture key to developing a critical understanding of history, echoing Agamben’s third critical level of the gestic, but there is also a reciprocal affectivity of history on gesture. That is, as much as we can look to gestures for coming to terms with history, we can see also that history shapes our gestures. To account for the gestic, therefore, is as much a question of *how* we research as much as *what* we research. Reima Pietilä researched design by-design.

From Benjamin, we inherit the dialectical image of history, the *thought-image*, “*denkbild*” (Richter, 2015). From Agamben, via Deleuze, we have the *movement-image*, where we are encouraged to take advantage of the “interval” in action that a gesture/image presents to us as perceivers/readers so that we can reconstitute the now “acentred” world according to our own criteria (Agamben, 2000, p.55; Deleuze, 1986, pp.61–62). Flusser suggests we can no longer discuss the present through the past – we must reconfigure our gesture of research towards the future; in other words, we can see Pietilä projects and drawings, as perhaps Reima Pietilä did, as *denkbilds*, *movement-images*, or, as this essay suggests, *thought-forms*, not only as a record of the past in the present but also as a movement between present and future within which we all have a stake. In this sense, the designer-as-researcher’s view guides all views. Rather than viewing history as the initiation of criticality, “the present is our starting point” (Flusser, 2014, p.158). History as the present opens out to the future; but, as Flusser suggests, the future flows reciprocally towards the present. This standpoint profoundly affects our actions and gestures, especially our gesture of searching: for Reima Pietilä, this is a design gesture, a research-for-the-sake-of-design gesture.



Flusser suggests that whilst researchers once moved confidently without any prospect of consensus and only the hope of discovery, now we lack the assurance of metaphysical or scientific truth (Flusser, 2014, p.150). Instead, we are bombarded by the abundance of “scientific passions” (Stengers, 2010, pp.1–13).<sup>8</sup> However, consequent “uncertainty and risk” has generated an institutional lack of confidence and stilted imagination; positivistic and conservative outcome-led directives now condition how and what we research (Stengers, 2011, p.416). As well as showing all our usual methodological doubts, our theories and methods now register the inflections of worry given to them by societal and politico-economic pressures.

As a result, I see this essay’s reflection on Reima Pietilä’s gestures not only as an opportunity to learn about his place in the history of modern Finnish and International architecture, but also to see how his gestures still hold relevant questions of modernity, as gestures of a trans-historical nature. Reima Pietilä projects a path between future political, philosophical, cultural, and architectural research through research-by-design methods. His trajectory might yet bring a confident and optimistic view of the future back into our contemporary movements. This essay moves into the relation between the design-action and design-reading of Reima Pietilä’s New Delhi Finnish Embassy. As we follow the dynamics of Reima Pietilä’s gestures, gesturing, and gesturality, we can see the communicative space of action opening up. It is this willingness to be “tossed to and fro” that opens up to comprehension of the communicative act when gesture is frozen as *thought-form*. Drawings are as much *thought-forms* as buildings (Figures 2–4). Each record gestures in their own ways. Each is a movement in suspended animation, a movement that once virtually re-animated represents no less than the communicative act and, as such, also opens levels of communication beyond intention or prediction.

## Gesture as form of research and research of form

There are 1,021 entries in the Pietilä archives for the New Delhi Finnish Embassy from the competition stages in 1963 to the building phase beginning in 1980.<sup>9</sup> From first design thoughts through to building and occupation, the Finnish Embassy project extended over twenty years. Of all the entries in the archive catalogue, only 37 are dated from 1963.<sup>10</sup> The proportionality in drawing numbers between competition stage and building stage is not unexpected. However, the hiatus in production of seventeen years is quite unusual. Nonetheless, although circumstances changed – as did the design – it is clear to see that the building registers early design (drawing) gestures (Figures 2 and 3a). These simple observations mark the Finnish Embassy as a special project in the Reima Pietilä oeuvre in at least three ways.

8 Following a Deleuzian turn, Stengers promotes a “cosmopolitical” manner of research where findings are the basis of new potential “becomings,” which in turn gather in dynamic cosmological constellations of scientific theories emanating from, for example, Mechanics, Thermodynamics, Quantum Mechanics, Chaos Theory, Artificial Intelligence, both becoming and going as ecologies of practices. She states, “The diagnosis of becomings does not assume the identification of possibles but their intrinsic link with a struggle against probabilities, a struggle wherein the actors must define themselves in terms of probabilities.” pp.12–13.

9 There are some drawings submitted as amendments to the Chancellery building dated March 2002.

10 The archive catalogue is dated April 28, 2004.

First, the New Delhi Finnish Embassy is one of the four foundational projects that characterize Raili and Reima Pietilä Architects as a unique design office (the other three being Kaleva Church, the Dipoli Student Union, and Suvikimpu Housing, where the buildings affirmatively gesture outwards towards trans-historical contextual specificity, beyond an historical interiority of only rational formality), and Reima Pietilä as a controversial but culturally pioneering Finnish figure. The Finnish Embassy in New Delhi, like the other three projects, moves away from the Finnish Pavilion in Brussels, where Blomstedt-neo-constructivist roots still grin through.<sup>11</sup> The New Delhi Finnish Embassy establishes the setting and framing of research into Pietilä's work as integral to the question of how to form, re-form, and in-form research into a Finnish architectural expression and, hence, arguably, how the whole Reima Pietilä oeuvre and archive might be understood as a continuous interrelated series of morphological gestures.<sup>12</sup>

Second, undertaken after the Finnish Pavilion in Brussels, the work period of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy overlaps with the other nine of the ten major Reima Pietilä public projects.<sup>13</sup> Undoubtedly, in such a small and intimate office, morphological and gestural intelligence was passed between projects.<sup>14</sup>

Third, with the major hiatus between the design competition win (1963) and the beginning of the building phase (1980), a significant opportunity arose for a maturation of Reima Pietilä's views on architecture and specifically concerning the New Delhi Finnish Embassy: for example, as Roger Connah notes, "though Pietilä can announce its genius loci context in 1983, the task was in no way predetermined in 1963" (Connah, 1989, p.304). In other words, the *New Delhi Finnish Embassy* operates through the most fecund phase of Reima Pietilä research and design work, where the morphological became the holding gesture of his research-by-design methodology.

### Thought-forms as trans-historical morphological methodology

Although Reima Pietilä's design practice was intentionally anarchic and "Against Method,"<sup>15</sup> all Reima Pietilä projects are consistently gestural in the sense of how each project develops and holds its own morphological enterprises. The search for form was a recurrent pursuit. However, for Reima Pietilä, form is not only to be understood as looking for geometry, language and metaphors. Form refers to discipline in both product and practice – ordinary and extraordinary. Form refers to the performativity of designer, equipment and design.<sup>16</sup> We can say, for example, a sportsman is in good form or a piece of apparatus is tuned to its best form. Form refers also, then, to undertaking what is necessary to maintain good form; only in the conjunction of best form of product and best form of practice is a designer able to aspire to be in top form or the form of their life.<sup>17</sup>

- 11 Connah elaborates his theory of Reima Pietilä's departure from Blomstedt's promotion of neo-constructivism and the conceit of non-representation as a crucial phase in Reima Pietilä's own theorizations. Connah, 1989, p.317.
- 12 The morphological, as frozen gesture, is a way to "preserve the rich dispersion of meaning of thought's first appearance," Pietilä, in Connah, 1989, p.325.
- 13 1. *Kaleva Church*, Tampere, 1964–66. 2. *Dipoli Student Union*, Espoo, Helsinki, 1961, 1962–66. 3. *Suvikimpu Housing*, Espoo, Helsinki, 1962, 1967–69, 1980–82. 4. *Sief Palace, Council of Ministers and Ministry of Foreign Affairs*, Kuwait, 1969–70, 1978–82. 5. *Hervanta Church, Shopping and Leisure Centre, Health Centre*, Hervanta New Town, Tampere, 1975, 1978–79, 1987. 6. *Tampere Library (and Moomin Museum)*, Tampere, 1978, 1983–86, (1987, 1993). 7. *Experimental Housing Project*, Malmikartano, Helsinki, 1978, 1980–82, 1982–84. 8. *Liekka Church*, Liekka, 1979, 1979–82. 9. *Apartment Block, Retirement Home and Kindergarten*, Pori, 1980, 1980–84.
- 14 "Most of his projects that follow this remarkable period from 1957–1963 either revisit previous projects, re-informing, altering, or widening the thematic concerns." Connah, 1989, p.309.
- 15 Connah consistently invokes a close reading of Paul Feyerabend's seminal work to underpin the avant-garde techniques of Pietilä's research methods. Although Reima Pietilä's works may at first appear unscientific, they are, in fact, pioneering and at the cutting edge of scientific experimentation: systematic (recurring) deconstruction of scientific (epistemological) systems through recurrent invention and production of new systems. To be against method is not to be without method. Pietilä's work embodies "the Against Method of a remarkable method." Connah, 1989, p.300.
- 16 For example, both the pipe and practice of smoking a pipe have form (Flusser, 2015, pp.118–134).
- 17 Gombrowicz paraphrased (Goddard, 2010, p.32).

Therefore, by looking at how the New Delhi Finnish Embassy was actually designed, we can see something that may be characteristic of a research-by-design methodology that is present in all of Pietilä's projects: they can be read as they were designed – both synchronically and diachronically. That is, each Reima Pietilä project is of its immediate time, but the distended deep time of history also runs through all of his projects. In many ways, each project and the drawing or photograph that records it can be considered as *thought-form* and as *form-of-practice*. Each *thought-form* refers to all others and the research they collectively take on and/or inspire. In other words, each project as *thought-form* and *form-of-practice* is a gestural residuary; not only is the New Delhi Finnish Embassy an embodiment of the gestures that arise as the specific motivated actions of the project in hand, it also acts as a residuary of associated gestures in other projects formative to it. "Pietilä's approach to architecture operates a perpetually evolving constellation, one that always expands and revolves about itself. A continuous stream of qualification results in an open-ended design process: there is no *being*, only *becoming* in the search of form" (Tore Tallqvist, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2017, p.42).

Design and building are acts of gestation: they are digested multiple histories that in each new embodied morphology nourish new series of possible readings and experiences. Early gestures are consumed by both design and designers and undergo further gestation. In other words, each *thought-form* is a digest from which we can project the history of (form and gesture in) all others and those even yet to come. The recurring gesturing-digesting of form describes Reima Pietilä's specific "trans-historical" research-by-design methodology (Connah, 1989, p.79).

## Five categories of Reima Pietilä's gestures

### 1. Title and name as gesture

The understanding of gesture as a communicative act allows us to see how gestures are part of the "motioning" of research. The early stages of thought and design expression is frequently more gestural than resolutely theoretical. Hence, it is possible to suggest that theorization, design theory, begins when gestures are readable – when they are read, digested, and enacted through further design gestures.

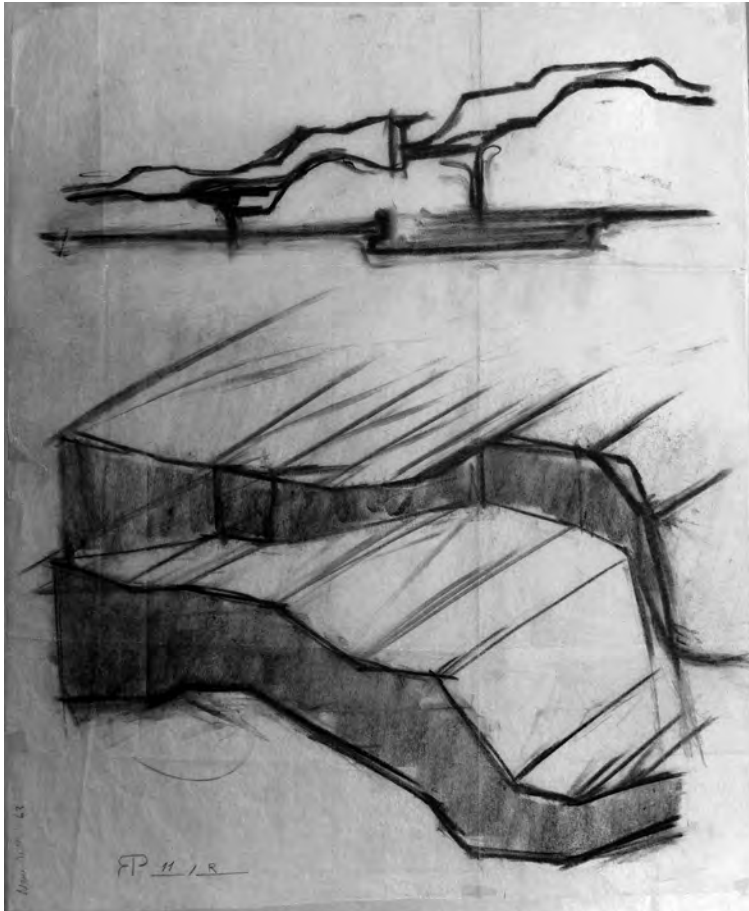


Figure 4  
Conceptual Section, Pietilä Archive,  
1963 (first phase of design), accessed  
and photographed in ALA Architects  
offices, Helsinki, July 2015.

The title given to the New Delhi Finnish Embassy project at competition submission was “Snow Speaks on Mountains” (lumi puhuu vuorilla). It is a very gestural title, invoking language exchange by and between inanimate objects. The title promotes dialogue between drawing(s) and situation, between Finland and India, between landscape and mountains, between some of the oldest Archaen Granites (Helsinki) and most recent Cenozoic sandstones (Delhi). The title invokes sea, lakes, mountains, clouds, snow, and sky. It hints at the space between the ground and snow, before, during, and after flakes falling; it intimates snow before and after it is snow – before it falls and after it has settled into glacier. The title speaks of high and low. It announces proximity and distance; we are simultaneously in view of the mountains in all their spatial vastness and beneath the snow with its spatial compression. We are between rifts and drifts on the ground and in the sky. If we think of the building in its Indian context, we are between an inside of cool Finnish light and white (Figure 8) and an outside of hot Indian tropical greens and pinkish browns (Figure 9).

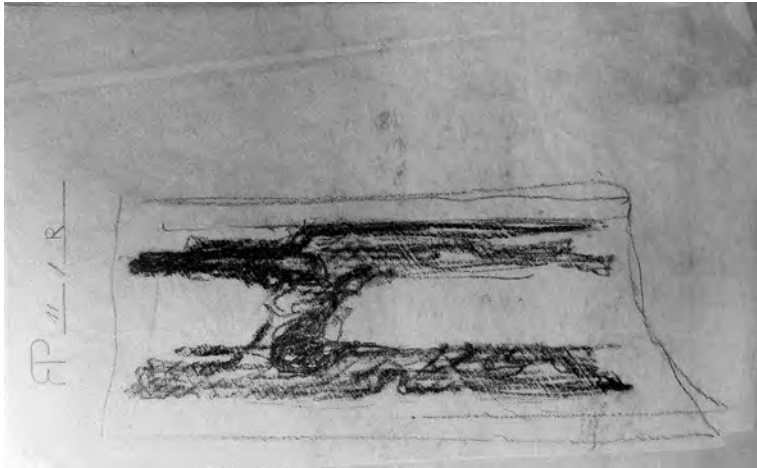


Figure 5  
Sketch Building Disposition, 1963  
(first phase of design), Pietilä Archive,  
accessed and photographed in ALA  
Architects offices, Helsinki, July 2015.

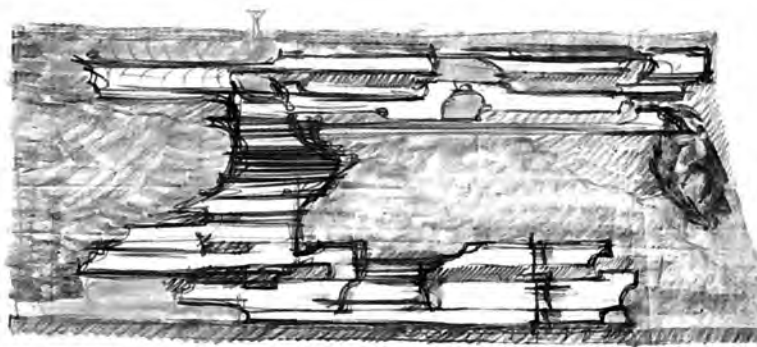


Figure 6  
Sketch Building Disposition, 1963 (first  
phase of design), (Connah, 1989, p.309)

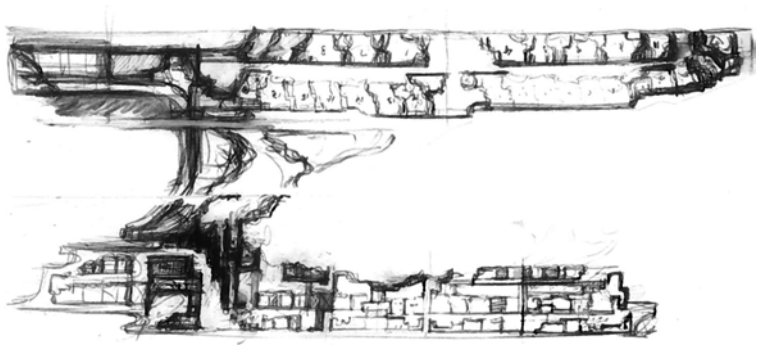


Figure 7  
Sketch Building Plan, 1963 (first phase  
of design), (Connah, 1989, p.308)



*Lumi puhuu vuorilla* acted as an envoy and is visited in various Reima Pietilä projects; it speaks between early and late Reima Pietilä. It moves through “The Zone” (1967), a further theorization with “copious studies of hills and lake forms.” Landscape is transformed into abstract gestures as well as directly into structural sections and varying plan arrangements in the New Delhi Finnish Embassy. It moves between the action of morphology to come and morphologies past.<sup>18</sup> Even as a title, we are being asked to operate in the unstable and inscriptively uneven space of “mentally derived terrain formations” (Figures 3a–3d) (Connah, 1989, p.322).

18 “Zone,” Connah suggests, is one of three projects that Reima Pietilä undertakes as consolidation of his own architectural theorizations: “All rigorous, all connected, all writing architecture... A project: Malmi Church. An exhibition: Zone. A text: Hobby Dogs.” An important point to underline here for this paper is that the three projects, in three varying modes of design articulation, outline a methodology for research-by-design: project, exhibition and text (Connah, 1989, p.322).



Figure 8  
Inside the Ambassador's Residence,  
South East entrance hall.

PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014



Figure 9  
Outside the Ambassador's Residence  
from South East.

PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014



The title, the gesture, moves – speaks – in both ways. The title orients and occidends, takes us before and after, backwards and forwards; it brings one place to another as each other. Designers title their work. Design work is entitled to such a gesture. Work, a work, holds gestures of the design actions that make it work. This, as Reima Pietilä says, is part of the “naming game.”<sup>19</sup> The name does not simply announce an object. It announces action – the actions of playing things out with humans caught up in them, as part of them: universal environmental relations are what we are part of and which architecture gesturally mediates.

Agamben “defines linguistic gesture as the stratum of language that is not exhausted in communication and that captures language, so to speak, in its solitary moment” (Agamben, 1999, p.77). It is this level of sophistication that facilitates reading the movement of history in any of Reima Pietilä’s *thought-forms*. His *thought-forms* hold many moments in the movement of language, be it, for example, spoken language, body language or architectural language. This is what Flusser, Agamben, Benjamin and Deleuze all suggest is possible. It is also what Reima Pietilä claims quite directly:

*I think in my native language Finnish. I talk whilst I draw – the rhythm and intonation of Finnish govern movements of my pencil. Do I draw in Finnish? My language rhythm influences my drawing shapes, phrases my lines, outlines my surfaces. The local cases and regional vocabulary of the Finnish language are the elements of my genuine way to express topological architecture and space.*<sup>20</sup>

## 2. Figurative and abstract gestures

Reima Pietilä’s precise and imprecise pen or pencil lines, rapidly applied charcoal strokes or felt tip overlays, are traces of movements (e.g. Figures 3a–3d, 4, 12). Actions follow the impulse of other actions. Such strokes seek to record gestures of formation: they are about form, conformity, and, surely, unconformity.<sup>21</sup> Designers recognize that at times a drawing seems to act on its own accord. A drawing directs the drawer’s actions. A drawing seems to gesture in its own terms. As Agamben suggests, “the gesture is the exhibition of a mediality: it is the process of making a means visible as such” (Agamben, 2000, p.58). Drawing reveals mediality. However, the mediality is not simply a means to an end. The goal of enacting such actions is not for the sake of the object but is rather a forming of character. Drawing, design, is an enriching of mediality: in other words, it is an enriching of experience so as designers we might experience what is really at stake. Or, as Flusser puts it in relation to painting, which we can equally say of drawing and building, “The goal of an analysis of the gesture of painting [drawing/building] is not to clear painting [drawing/building] out of the way. Rather, it consists of entering into the enigma of painting [drawing/building] more deeply so as to be able to draw a richer experience from it” (Flusser, 2014, p.65). These actions,

19 A search for a “Finnish Morphological Vocabulary,” (Pietilä, *Hobby Dogs*, in Connah, 1989, p.327).

20 Reimä Pietilä, *Intermediate zones in modern architecture*. Museum of Finnish Architecture: Helsinki, 1985, p.8. (quoted in Griffiths, 2009, pp.28–39).

21 Unconformity is a concept, developed by James Hutton, based on observations and interpretations of stratifications and fault lines in rock formations (Hutton, 1788). It was radical in its day for dating the earth in the geological time-scales that we currently understand. Hence, we can now speak of geological time and the gestures of multiple deep times which over- and under-score all gestures of the Anthropocene.

and the gestures we can read in the records of such actions, have to be repeated. This experience, ultimately, is an experience of experience and is to become so again in the built architectural experience – for Reima Pietilä, not only in the New Delhi Finnish Embassy, but also in every project that follows from 1963, there is enrichment upon enrichment.

Speaking of abstract modern art, Hans-Georg Gadamer notes that there is a representational force to art gestures. He says this is the basis of the meaningfulness in abstract art. His insight suggests that even though abstraction is non-figurative and communicative modality is not explicit, an artwork is still communicative. Its means are gestural; hence, it can be read. For example, Reima Pietilä's drawing-strokes (or Malevich's brush-strokes) are embedded within abstractions (Figure 4). Their communicability lies somewhere between the fact that the drawing-strokes are truncated actions, suspended animations and gestures, but also, then, pointers towards inconclusive actions that demand a reading as a questioning of what they are leading to; that is, we understand them as representations and that they mean something. "Even in those modern pictures built up out of meaningful elements that dissolve into something unrecognizable, we can still sense a last trace of familiarity and experience a fragmentary act of recognition" (Gadamer, 1986, p.100). We can read the gestures that made them and even if all that we take as meaningfulness is such a recognition, a recognition of a gesture towards communication, these are profound acts of communication: "What would be said ... should be said if one could say it" (Pietilä, 1967, in Connah, 1989, p.270).

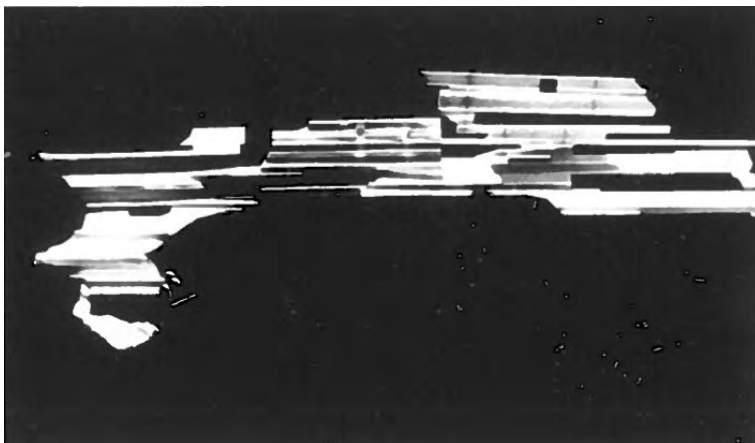
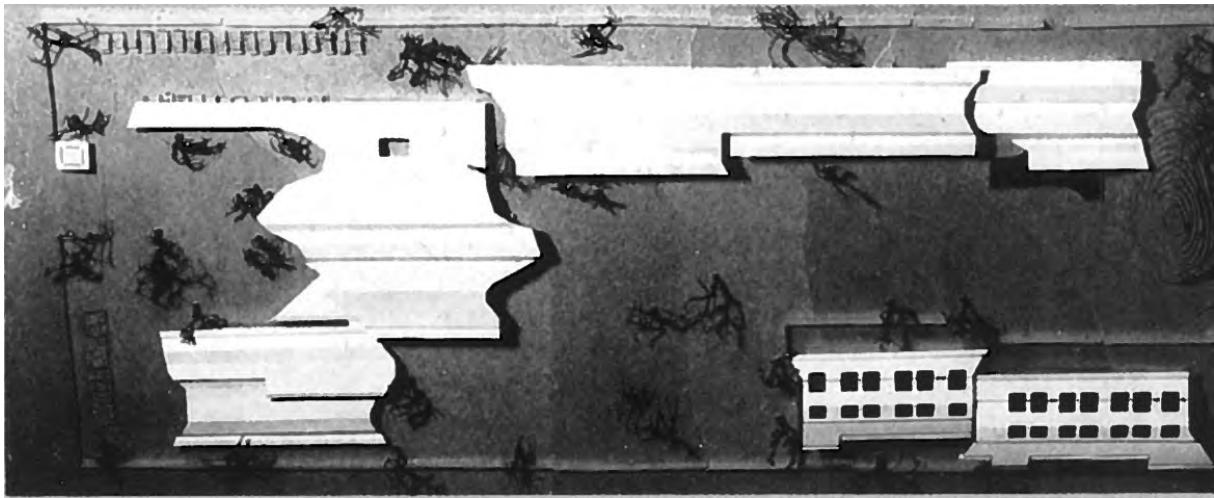


Figure 10  
Maquette of Building Disposition, 1963  
(first phase of design), (Connah, 1989,  
p.310)



### 3. Open gestures

In turning his drawing-sights towards India, Reima Pietilä opened his practice and his mind. His first drawings were clearings and openings (Figures 3a, 4, 5). Within clearings and openings, we see and hear. As Flusser suggests, if one is really attentive one can obtain an “ecstatic experience” in the unexpected delight of noticing what is heard (Flusser, 2014, p.117). Opening in this way, through design, places us amongst many situations—between philosophical and political dispositions. Reima Pietilä was already situated deep in the Finnish landscape. During the competition phase, he retreated even further into it – to think, see, and listen more attentively.<sup>22</sup> He looked deeply into the landscape and listened to how landscape as design might speak. He did not seek only to project Finland into India but also to receive India into Finland. Although this may be the job of an Embassy, Pietilä determined it also to be the manner of his design gestures. Design opens communication between two different landscapes: between here (drawing) and there (situation); and between different cultures in the same world. Pietilä’s work makes a clearing and opening. Listening is inscribed into it. He operates a kind of Heideggerian expropriation-appropriation oscillation (Heidegger, 1972, pp.22–23), and there is an ecstatic aspect to all of his design work.

It is interesting to respond to bureaucratic political space (an Embassy) with a gesture that is completely *other*. Although it situates itself in the physical and political landscape of New Delhi, such a landscape is perceived to be neither here nor there (Figures 5, 6, 7, 10, 11). The reality of this landscape lies in its gestural framework. The building gestures beyond the limits of a compound, beyond the limits of either political or architectural historical enterprise. However, it nonetheless holds out and holds in the ground of both politics and its place in architectural history. The drawing is the ground for such a theorization. Drawing strokes are groundstrokes.

Figure 11  
Maquette of Building Disposition, 1980  
(second phase of design), (Connah, 1989,  
p.313)

22 “During that Summer as the competition took shape we lived in a fisherman’s cottage in the region. We copiously studied the forms of hills and lakes transforming them into structural sections and varying plan arrangements” (Connah, 1989, p.309).

As Flusser notes, these terms – “take, grasp, hold, handle, bring forth, produce” (Flusser, 2014, p.32) – all describe the movement, gestures, of our hands. The gestures of making a drawing, making an architecture in a landscape are all 1:1 bodily actions transposed into larger scale (1:400 was the preferred scale for the competition entry – it is an unusual scale, but probably registers the scaling of the paper and drawing board to the body and the prescribed limits of the embassy site; these kinds of proportions are intuitively understood when skilled designers move their hands across a surface, hence, the difficulties and extra skill required to navigate the scale-less and virtual digital world). As Flusser notes, these first gestures of making/drawing, begin with a reaching out of the hands and an opening of the arms. “We know this gesture,” he says. “It is the gesture of reception, of taking in, of opening up to the future” (Flusser, 2014, pp.34–35).

For Reima Pietilä, building and drawing operate in this openness. The building holds a place – a space, a world – in the continuous open. “The building is a situation, an analogous situation – a connection of events between the outer, unlimited content and the inner, limited content. A functionally indifferent architectural form. A morphic interval of two amorphous zones” (Pietilä, *The Zone*, 1967, quoted by Connah, 1989, p.319). Reima Pietilä’s architecture predicts Agamben’s articulation of Heidegger’s dialectic of “intimate strife” between openness and closedness, revealing and concealing, that we experience in the relation between world and earth and which has its parallel in the work of art and architecture (Agamben, 2004, p.71). Reima Pietilä’s architecture confronts the strife directly. In doing so, Reima Pietilä also seems to predict Agamben’s formulation of how to do so whilst keeping our gestures open. Reima Pietilä creates an architecture of *pure means* (Agamben, 1999), a means of expression that expresses itself primarily as means. Perhaps also conceivable as a reworking of the Kantian formulation of “purposiveness without purpose” (see Adorno, 1979), Reima Pietilä proposes functionality without function, and functions free from the need of form to describe and fix them. “It is as though Pietilä asks more from mere form” (Connah, 1986, p.66). For Reima Pietilä, form is means and mediality.

#### 4. Mediating gestures

The roof of the Embassy is not the ground. The roof cantilevers dramatically through the abyss of sectional space (Figure 3a). It is something other. It gestures up and down in serial unequal measures (Figures 3–3c). Certainly, it has “bumps and hollows” (Pietilä, *The Zone*, 1967, reproduced in Connah, 1989, p.322), in and between each thickening and thinning (Figures 3a, 12). It gestures and receives gestures. It receives rays from the sun and offers shade and shadows in return. Connah calls it a “carapace” (Connah, 1989, p.306). However, it is as much immaterial as material. Even in 1967, Reima Pietilä was still in his “morphology-collecting stage” (Pietilä, *Hobby Dogs*, 1967, as reproduced in Connah, 1989, p.325).



Maybe it is more the receiver of gestures rather than agent of its own course. Between the body movements, wind flows, light rays, rains, and heat thermals perhaps the roof is merely cast in the gestures of other physical forces. It listens, feels, and inflects. Remarkably, in the archive catalogue some drawings are given the title “Wind Speaks on Low Hills” (not snow and not mountains).<sup>23</sup> This phrase, apparently, very accurately describes the Finnish north. Certainly, it is possible to read the roof-section drawings equally as “snow carapace” or as “wisps of wind.” It might even be read as “cloud cushion.” It is as much the environmental as the constructional gestures that define key formalities for Reima Pietilä.<sup>24</sup>

23 “Tuuli puhuu vaaroilla.” Entries 11/ KL1–5 in the Pietilä archive are all noted with this title. Vaaroilla are low hills and vuorilla mountains. Vaaroilla and vuorilla are etymologically bound to each other, perhaps as Reima Pietilä sees the Himalayas and the low Finnish hills.

24 In *Hobby Dogs*, Reima Pietilä refers to both his morphological procedures and morphological designs as being “cloudlike” (Connah, 1989, p.327).

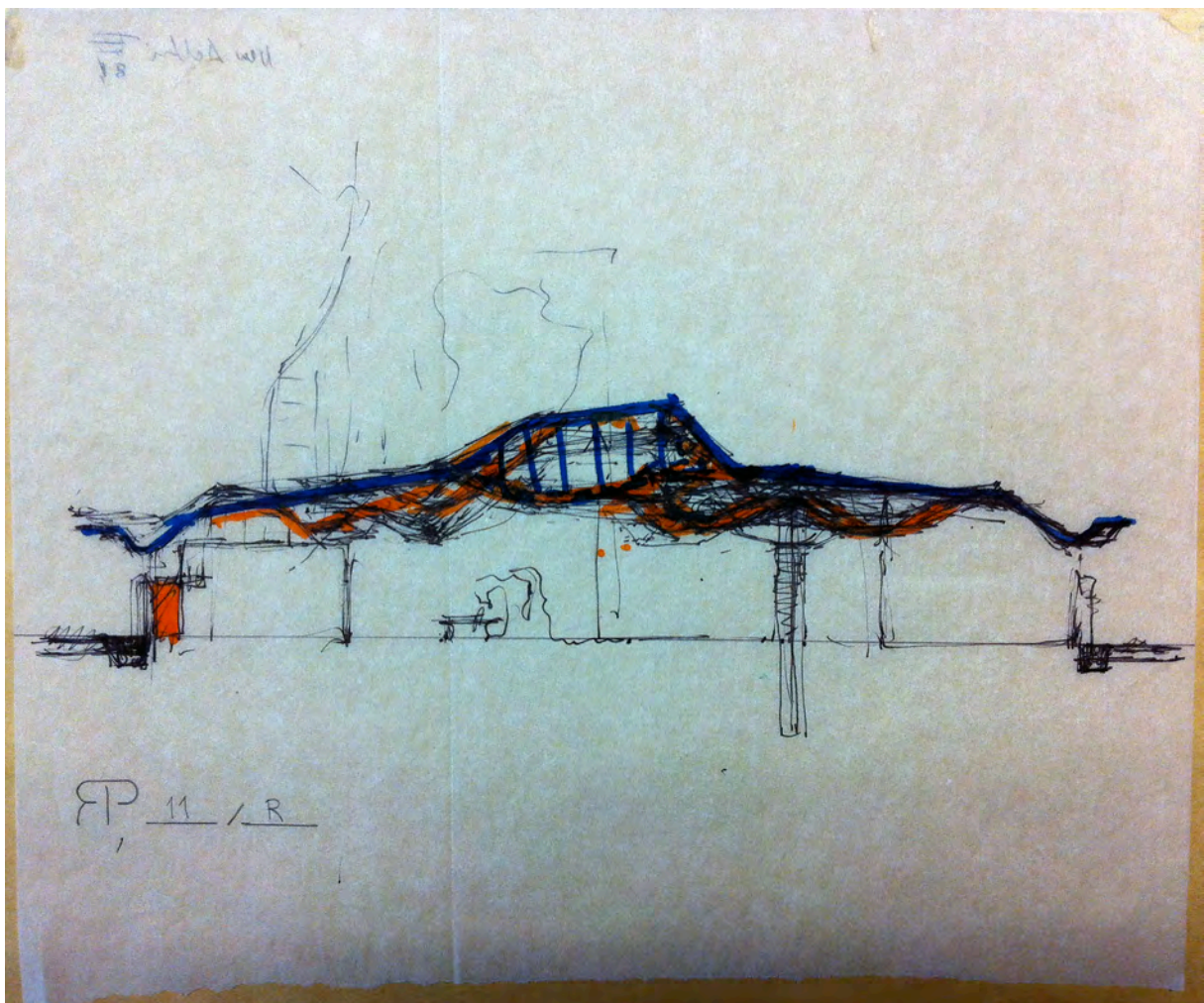


Figure 12  
Sketch Chancery Section, 1980 (second phase of design), Pietilä Archive, accessed and photographed in ALA Architects offices, Helsinki, July 2015.



**Figure 13**  
**Chancery beyond the Ambassador's Residence**

PHOTO, SIMO RISTA, 1986, PROVIDED BY ALA ARCHITECTS, HELSINKI, FINLAND, 2015, AS PART OF THEIR PUBLICITY FOR THE PLANNED REFURBISHMENT OF THE EMBASSY.



**Figure 14**  
**Chancery, Ambassador's Office**

PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014

The Chancery (Figures 12, 13), from 1980 designed as a distinct part of the building, maintains the gesture of flowing over the ground without interrupting its surface. This roof section acts alongside that of the Ambassador's and other residential blocks, collectively as folded and imbricated plates with occasional "hobby-dog-ears".<sup>25</sup> The folds follow a flow of glacial gesturality (the same deep etchings that can be seen the world over). This grooved-roof-ground-ice-score carries expansive yet "tolerable lightness of meanings" (Connah, 1989, p.306). Many meanings can be projected onto this figurative flexibility. Functionality, function, and meaning are inflected by the roof's multi-faceted wanderings.

<sup>25</sup> "I have in mind several morphological architectural cases and two different pictures of the quality of their mutual similarity." Pietilä, Hobby Dogs, "Sample 1: Goal Pictures" (Connah, 1989, p.327).



The Chancery Roof predominantly holds the public-private interface of the project. It holds, between its continuous ground datum and single undulating soffit, the various functions of border agency. More often than not in the time of functional modernism, offices are expressed as utilitarian boxes, extensions of the filing cabinets and paper they generate rather than as gathering spaces for the people whose interests they serve. It is unusual to have the offices of state expressed as flowing, borderless, spaces-between.

Territoriality in an Embassy is usually expressed as extension of national ground. However, in the *Suomen suurlähetystö* ground is expressed as a different kind of extraterritoriality: it is indefinite and open, seemingly part of an expansive outside universal landscape rather than an inside, confined and closed political landscape—ground is neither possessed nor dominated. “The world of offices and registeries, of musty, shabby, dark rooms, is Kafka’s world,” Walter Benjamin suggests (Benjamin, 1992, p.109). However, Reima Pietilä’s Chancery is not this. It is a space articulated by illuminations and shade rather than decay-grey bureaucracy (Figure 14). It is certainly not shabby. The folding soffit reflects light coming in from above, below and the sides. It is occasionally coffered. There are spots of precise illumination. At night, like all the Embassy roofs, it is a glowing striation of upturned sconces – an artificial bright sky. It expresses exactly what it is: a space between international functionaries and functionalities, where hosts make room for guests.<sup>26</sup>

The diplomatic mission of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy is expressed in democratic rather than hierarchical spatial terms. There is no axial symmetry, grand staircase, or elevated tower. There is no panopticon. Reima Pietilä’s landscape, although situated in an enclave of power, is not made for “decrepit officials” and “doorkeepers” who stare at visitors and “strikingly appear in the fullness of their power” (Benjamin, 1992, p.109). There is only a series of informal humps and hollows; inflections of light and shade; and anthropometrically dimensioned doors, screens, and furniture within and around which people cluster.

There is an ethical dimension to the disposition and gestural framework of the New Delhi Finnish Embassy. Reima Pietilä mediated communications between the two countries. He has not foreclosed relations through an architecture that presents potency. Rather, he opened the sphere of gestures to announce the Embassy’s ethical, equitable position through the media of architecture by gesturing in an even-handed, open, and welcoming way. “What characterizes gesture is that in it nothing is produced or acted, but rather something is being endured and supported. The gesture, in other words, opens the sphere of ethos as the more proper sphere of that which is human” (Agamben, 2000, p.57).

26 Connah offers an amusing comparison between the spatial character of the Finnish, Belgian, and French embassies in New Delhi. He too acknowledges what I have suggested as democratic space in the Finnish Embassy. However, he suggests there is a sort of fairground aspect to an embassy enclave and hence Reima Pietilä’s theatricality operates in distinction to at least two other exhibitionist paradigms: that of the sub-Louis-Kahn mock-Mughal fort of the Belgian embassy (Satish Gujral) and the monumental modernist stripped classical axial power play of the French embassy (Paul Chematov), all completed about the same time of the mid 1980s. Connah writes, “If Chematov wanted to theatricalize power and representation perhaps he succeeded. In front of the Finnish Embassy, I imagined more than a few stray cows munching on the lawns. ... and the Belgian Embassy gives me another vision. I see a character from a Hindi movie using the chandeliers and swinging down to the chains below with a bigger splash!” Connah reflects, from his post-Pietilä archiving and midst his Indian free-lance writing phase, “These are eclectic times” (Connah, 1986, p.76).

## 5. Other gestures and gestures of others

As well as gestural reciprocity between drawings and buildings, there is a gestural reciprocity at work that pertains to materials. It is possible to read something of the gestural exchanges between stone, concrete, timber, and glass, the architects, the craftspeople, and the tools which action formal intentions, hopeful predictions and material limitations.

The more one looks at the arrangements of stones, for example, the more one marvels at the evident gestural exchange between architects and masons. It is clear that some of the stones could only be made to site-drawn 1:1 templates, hand-to-hand and stone-to-stone, for example: most of the stones that inscribe the line of the roof, and, certainly, the marvellous skew-stone of the sill to the Ambassador's residence first-floor window on the southeast corner is unique (Figure 15).



**Figure 15**  
**Ambassador's Residence from South East**

PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014

The extraordinary stone pattern, emanating from Rajasthan (Connah, 1989, p.306), further east on the same Cenozoic strata in which Delhi sits, which may be compared with some of the amazing fretwork fabrications in the historical city of Jaisalmer, is an exercise in exactness. The lines of landscape and construction are taken to two complimentary extremes: the woven textile-like lineaments of repeat interlocking "pinkish" stones, ashlar in the Ambassador's House and riven in the general residences, are the precise partner to the more incidental but nonetheless crisp white plates and thickened ribs of the concrete roof pleats.

The glazing between these elements has something else to say; it moves in different lines. Working appositely to internal screens, the outer tracery is inflected to slots and slits, webs, and meshes, pushed and pulled but suspended between wall and roof (Figures 16, 17), occasionally wrapped

into bubble-like teak-strung aedicules that proffer vantage points, for example, for ambassadorial overview (Figure 15). Mullions and transoms, vents, view-frames, shades, and screens all carry the gestures of other expressions. There seems to be no single teak frame of repeat dimension to another. To articulate thoughts on these individual actions would be no less than scripting a series of exchanges between teak workers and glaziers and between artists and picture-framers. In every media of architectural communication, we see the gestures of *illeity*.<sup>27</sup>

27 *Illeity* is a term theorized by Immanuel Levinas. It refers to the trace of an “other”. The term invokes the presence of someone through the recognition of the markings they leave in their absence. They are frequently deliberate but not always easily legible. The key point revolves around recognizing the humanity rather than the identity of the person who made the marks (Levinas, 1998, pp.69–72).



Figure 16  
Ambassador's Residence from South  
East, side study east of Drawing Room  
PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014



Figure 17  
Ambassador's Residence Drawing Room  
looking onto internal courtyard.

PHOTO, DORIAN WISZNIEWSKI, JUNE 2014

## Conclusion

An elaboration of the gestural in words is difficult, as Wittgenstein suggests. It is to be “tossed to and fro.” Developing an understanding of gesture from close readings of Giorgio Agamben and Vilém Flusser, this essay has attempted to state as clearly as possible what a gesture is. It has emphasized the importance of a reciprocity between movement and the reading of traces of movement as the basis of formulating gesture as an act of communication. I have suggested that gesture is a core communicative principle necessary to framing a science that could describe Reima Pietilä's design methods: the study of gesture is proffered as means to navigate between a form-of-language and a language-of-form. The essay argues that Reima Pietilä's form of research as research-by-design broadens the definition of form: drawings and buildings can be considered *thought-forms* and, as such, trans-historical *forms-of-practice* (simultaneously synchronic and diachronic in continuity). They are digests of design theorization in which, “there is no *being*, only *becoming* in the search of form” (Tore Tallqvist, in Niskanen, Jetsonen and Lindh, 2007, p.42).

As a further elaboration of the science of Reima Pietilä's morphological experiments, I have here outlined five possible categories of gesture discerned from the New Delhi Finnish Embassy. They are posited as anchor points in the sea of simultaneous excess and lack that flows between drawings and buildings and words and images: the gesture of title and name; figurative and abstract gestures; open gestures; mediating gestures; and other gestures and gestures of others. They do not comprise a conclusive list. There are no doubt other categories of gesture that could be framed (environmental gestures or water gestures, for example, specifically those that receive, hold and direct India's monsoon rains).<sup>28</sup> For sure, there are more categories of gesture that could be outlined and studied for other Pietilä projects (for example, gestures of well-being in the apartment block, retirement home, and kindergarten, in Pori, 1980–84). See note 13.

Although a limited study, this paper argues that Reima Pietilä's *thought-forms* not only make the science of research-by-design plausible: as studies that operate through the gestic dimension of architecture, they also set out a trans-historical methodological impulse which could be extrapolated into and deemed relevant to different times and different situations. To engage with gesture, as Reima Pietilä seemed to know very well (see note 6), is not simply *ontology-as-being* but is *ontology-as-becoming*. Learning from Reima Pietilä, this essay advocates the gesture of research-by-design towards *becoming-humanity* through *becoming-in-architecture*. Reima Pietilä's architecture expresses humanity in every gesture of its making.

28 More could be theorized on gesture: coming to terms with Derrida's "overflowing of the performative" would further elaborate the communicability of gesture (Derrida, 2002, p.255); Agamben's notion of the gag frames something of the "being at a loss in language" that gestures attempt to mediate (Agamben, 1999, pp.78–79); and Flusser's "interface theory" of gestures would elaborate how gesture draws and holds diverse disciplines together (Flusser, 2015, pp.161–176).

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### Biographical information

Dr. Dorian Wiszniewski  
Edinburgh School of Architecture and  
Landscape Architecture (ESALA)  
Edinburgh College of Art  
University of Edinburgh  
Address: 20 Chambers St,  
Edinburgh EH1 1JZ, UK  
Phone: +44 131 650 2311  
E-mail: dorian.wiszniewski@ed.ac.uk

A partner in Wiszniewski Thomson Architects and senior academic in ESALA. Works have been published and exhibited nationally and internationally. Awards include the Royal Scottish Academy Medal for Architecture in 2006. Recent academic output focuses on research-led design and design-led research with core interests on processes of design in urbanization, specifically in relation to water resources, particularly through the intersection of architectural and philosophical questions on socio-economic representation and production. Dorian Wiszniewski leads various post graduate programmes in ESALA. In 2014, along with the PhD Architecture By Design community in ESALA, he founded Drawing On, a peer reviewed international e-journal that acts as a platform for developing topics associated with or addressed through design-led research into architecture.